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THE PLACE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL IN OUR SYSTEM OF EDUCATION¹

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The free public high school is an educational necessity. The common school, in which are exploited the rudimentary branches, and from which the immature child can obtain at best but a mere modicum of superficial knowledge, does not equip a boy or girl of twelve or fourteen years of age with that measure of self-helpfulness essential to success in this new century. The word "high" as applied to a certain division of our school work is an erroneous appellation, a very unfortunate and misleading designation for that which is extremely ordinary, and by no means high or uncommon. The common school, poor and puny as it was, seemed quite well adapted to the times of our fathers, who were copyists of monarchical customs, and when the colleges were almost exclusively for those who would learn to expound the gospel through a study of the original Greek or Hebrew; when this Empire of the West was a wilderness, and the rivers ran unfretted to the sea; when no bridges crossed the streams, and no steamers traversed the waters; when there were no railroads, nor telegraphs, nor telephones, nor phonographs; when the mountains were not tunneled, nor ocean spanned, nor mines developed; when the president-elect of the United States went from Boston to Washington on horseback to be inaugurated, and it took ten cents and a week's time to send a letter from New York to Philadelphia; when there was no monopoly in trade, and competition was the life of business; when the cobbler made our shoes and the housewife our clothes; when the "butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker" were abroad in the land; when each man plied his own trade or lived on his own little farm; when his capital was brawn rather than brain, and head-thinking was subordinated to hand-hustling.

In that age of the pioneer, when forests had to be felled, roads

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constructed, and the "rude huts of our forefathers" erected, there was little time and less occasion for a schoolroom education such as is demanded in these days of our refined civilization, our scientific methods of thought, and our commercial transactions with the ends of the earth. We are living in an age of automatic machinery, where the raw material goes in on one side, and the finished product comes out on the other side. The world's work is mental rather than manual.

The common school of that early day, for that early people, was more than the high school of our day for our people. The division, then, of our public schools into "common", "high," and "college" is misleading. The term "elementary" should embrace what are now known as the first twelve grades, comprehending in general the time of life between the ages of six and eighteen. Proper facilities for such an education should be within the reach of every normal child. The equipment, mental and moral, secured by the child within these years, from well-directed instruction adapted to his needs, capacities, and pre-natal endowments, is not superior, in its relations to the world of today, with all its strenuousness and struggle and strife, to that equipment which the school of the three R's gave to the children of two or three generations ago, when one dollar was equal to five dollars now, and when what are now the necessities, or at least comforts, of life were luxuries and obtainable only by the few, if at all. If the public for its safety, security, and success; for its growth, development, and progress; for its comfort and contentment, would mete out to the children of the present in the way of opportunity what it supplied to those of three-score years ago, it must place this misnamed higher instruction within the reach of all.

It is time we put aside that foolish cant that gives to the schools of one hundred years ago the credit of producing the Websters and the Clays, the Stowes and the Somervilles. They were great in spite of the schools. Manual training and domestic science were compulsory in those days; boys and girls were taught the dignity of labor and the danger of shirking, not in the schools, but in the fields and the forests, in the chambers and the kitchens, and it was a question of keeping the wolf from the door, not of buying sealskins and sable furs. We sometimes hear the little red schoolhouse deified, as if

within its walls were wrought the ribs of steel that were fashioned into the framework of our superb government. Fie on it! The schooling of those days was that of privation and suffering, of hard labor, digging stones to build walls, splitting rails to make fences; of labor from early morn, with the axe and the saw, the plow and the drag, the flail and the spinning-wheel, the mop and the churn. These were the gymnastics of the pioneers, out of which came men and women of human sympathy, and human love, and human devotion.

But today all is different, and it is no longer in the field and the forest, but in the schools, elementary and higher; that we must develop mind and teach manners and morals and citizenship and civic righteousness.

What made three millions happy then will not make eighty millions contented now. Wherever we find now the custom of living and laboring that prevailed scores of years ago, we find poverty and penury, sloth and sluggishness, ignorance and stupidity, if not in reality, at least in the seeming.

We do nothing as our fathers did. We neither live in the same style of houses, eat the same kind of food, drink the same kind of water, nor sleep in the same kind of beds. We neither sow, nor reap nor gather into barns as did they. Methods of buying, selling, and trading are all changed; commercial transactions, travel from place to place, intercommunication, are differently conducted. We manufacture more in a day than formerly in a decade. Agriculture has improved by leaps and bounds. The beneficial results flowing from our experimental stations through the intercessions of governmental interest, in analyzing the chemistry of soils, showing defects and presenting remedies; in the breeding of corn, making land yield a hundred bushels where before it yielded but fifty, and of greatly improved quality; in the feeding and fattening of cattle and swine; in the destruction of pests; in the scattering of bacteria to produce alfalfa, where none would grow before, are making the intelligent and educated farmer the aristocrat of the nation; while they who sneer at the claims of higher education, and are satisfied with things as they were, are being relegated very rapidly to the rear. The claims, circumstances, and conditions of life at present, then, make it of supreme importance that we should give the opportunities of a high-school

education, within easy access and free tuition, to all our young people, without regard to race, class, color, or station in life.

President Roosevelt recently said:

If you are going to do anything permanent for the average man, you have got to begin *before* he is a man. . . . Speaking generally, the chance of success lies in working with the boy and not with the man. I think people often completely misapprehend what are really the important questions. The question of the tariff, the currency, and even the regulation of railroad rates are all subordinate to the great basic moral movements which mean the preservation of the individual in his or her relation to the home, because if the homes are all straight, the state will take care of itself.

Dr. James, in his inaugural address, said:

The state university is, to my mind, necessary in order to help maintain the democracy of education, to help keep education progressive, and finally in order to keep higher education close to the people and make it the expression and outgrowth of their needs.

It is corrective rather than directive; it is co-operative rather than monopolistic. It should be as universal as the American democracy, as broad, as liberal, as sympathetic, as comprehensive—ready to take up into itself all the educational forces, giving recognition for good work wherever done, and unifying, tying together all the multiform strands of educational activity into one great cable, whose strength no man may weaken or measure.

Frank Vanderlip, former assistant secretary of the treasury, said in a recent address:

Education is the secret of our commercial expansion. I have made a careful study of Germany's economic success, and I have become firmly convinced that the explanation of the remarkable progress there is to be traced, in the most direct manner, to the German system of education. The schoolmaster is the great corner-stone of Germany's remarkable commercial and industrial progress. The school system of Germany bears a relation to the economic situation that is not met with in any other country.

We all know something of the thorough secondary education which the laws of Germany insist should be given to its youth. Principles of wise business management are taught. The aim is to prepare a student for the practical conduct of a business. He gains knowledge of production and consumption, of markets, and of the cause of price fluctuations. He is put into a position to acquire an insight into concrete business relations, and into trade practices and conditions. Are not these aims worthy of our schools? What truer

democracy can there be than to have a school system that will point the way to every worker, no matter how humble, by which he may rise to a position of importance in the industry in which he is engaged?

To do all this does not mean the "commercializing" of our educational states. There is no need for opposition even from those who hold that it is not the place of the schools to teach youths how to earn a livelihood. There are in the United States 10,000,000 of population between the ages of fifteen and twenty years. Three-quarters of that number are not in attendance at any school. What an unreckonable advantage it would be if a substantial proportion of that seven and one-half millions were to be brought within the influence of a practical system of education designed to make such youth a more efficient economic unit.

The shibboleth of educators should be that not alone in cities large and small, nor in town and villages, whence rise the smoke of industry and the din of business, but in every community, rural as well as urban or suburban, whose children are born to the same birth-right, inherit the same talents, are endowed by nature as richly, and are as full of promise, as the children who live on city boulevards, there shall rise in some central spot, where the trees cast their shadows and the prairies around glow with the fruits of toil, a high school where the humblest child shall find opportunity for development along the lines of his adaptability, even as the city child is furnished instruction according to his environments.

I am aware that the members of this association need neither the lore of the past nor the logic of the present to convince them of the necessity of fair play in the distribution of educational opportunities. It is rather the people who are denied, or who deny themselves, these privileges for their children that should be awakened, aroused to a sense of their irretrievable loss, to a sense of their inalienable rights.

I do not indulge in a melancholy pessimism when I say it is a shame, an outrage, in this land which boasts of equal rights and equal opportunities, in this great state of Illinois, with its boundless resources and its incalculable wealth, where the barns and granaries are bursting with the products of the richest soil nature and time have made, that the boys of the farm, the children of the prairies, as bright,

as promising, as willing, and as winsome as any the sun shines upon, must be satisfied with the merest morsel of the educational feast spread with such bountiful richness before the children of the city; or drive in buggy or ride on horseback miles and miles to some prosperous village, and pay from twenty-five to fifty dollars a year tuition for those privileges which ought to be brought to their doors as free, as full, as rich, as rare, as those for which the people so generously tax themselves in the more populous centers.

We are constantly crying out against the exodus from the farms to the cities, from the centers of virtue to the centers of vice; and yet by our apathy and indifference we are denying to the children of the prairies that education which lies at the foundation of our national progress, which is the greatest boon that comes to our homes, and which is the surest precursor of more happiness and contentment than all the stocks and bonds of the Rockefellers and the Vanderbilts. The country life of America should be made as pleasant, as attractive, as inspirational, as the country life of England. The people of the rural districts furnish the sinews of war in times of war, and are rapidly furnishing the sinews of peace in these piping times of peace. Never in the history of this agricultural nation has the soil spoken so eloquently to us as during the harvest just gathered: \$6,415,000,000 dollars worth of cereals for the world's consumption! What does it all mean? The farmers here and there are fast becoming their own bankers, brokers, stockholders and home-owners; mortgages are disappearing as mist before the morning sun.

The deep researches of science published in hundreds of thousands of pamphlets are telling us that we can raise \$10,000,000,000 worth of products from the properly preserved and enriched soil where we have now raised \$6,000,000,000 worth. The education of these sons and daughters of the field and the forest along these lines is the one crying need of the day.

It is high time, then, that we, who are supposed to control educational thought and educational progress, should sound the tocsin of reformation and revolution all over the prairies of our peerless state, and carry the alarm to every "village and farm," and so awake the slumbering thoughts of the farmers, the first citizens of the land, to their needs, their privileges, their rights, that they will knock at the

doors of our legislative halls, until shall come an enactment that shall give us high schools—by state aid, if necessary—that will be as free, and as easy of access, as are the little crossroad schools in the least populated districts of our counties and townships.

The high school is not only an essential in that which it of itself gives, through its own instruction in the character-building of its pupils, but it is of incalculable inspiration to the common schools which administer to the preceding years of a child's life. It has been asserted over and over again, and with cumulative emphasis, that all improvement in the means and methods of mind-training has its initiative, not in the below, but in the above.

As rain and snow and warmth and light come from on high, so do the influences that make men wiser and teachers more sensible. It has been clearly and incontrovertibly demonstrated that since the high school became a fixed institution in the curriculum of our national study, the common schools of our cities and larger towns have been lifted out of a condition of monotonous mediocrity and placed upon a much higher plane of national instruction. Not only has this higher education—which, please remember, I do not regard as very high—been instrumental in the gradual introduction of music, drawing, physical culture, manual training, and domestic science into the lower schools, but it has more especially and more essentially given to every teacher higher aims, and infused into every pupil higher ambitions. Every hill seems high from the deeps of a valley, but hills dwindle in the sight of small mountains, and ordinary mountains become valleys as we climb Mont Blanc and Mount Shasta. Wherever the common school furnishes all the education for which the people tax themselves, there you will find poor schools, because there is nothing beyond. The dyspeptic pessimist who has no children—or, if he has, ought not to have them—may deny this, but his very denial is an *a priori* proof of its truth. And whenever you find a fairly good high school enlarging and enriching itself with more scholarly and more sympathetic teachers, and with a better equipment, there you will find the common school being gradually uplifted and strengthened and improved. When the rank and file of children secure all the oatmeal instruction which the schools in their neighborhood offer, it is natural for them to think that they have

about all the education that is necessary. The teacher or teachers of such a school have little ambition beyond the perfunctory performance of their daily routine of duties. The citizens are indifferent to the higher needs of their children, because the school exerts no influence beyond the quarter acre on which it is located, and there is no educational ozone in the atmosphere around. If perchance, in this deadening circle of work and sleep, there is some bright boy who happens to find a good book that interests him, like a biography of a Franklin, a Lincoln, or a Stephenson, and from communion with his own thoughts and the thoughts of others breaks away from the deteriorating influence of his environment, and strikes out for himself with a persistent determination to get an education and be somebody, it is more than likely that his associates will conclude that he was preordained of the gods to be a scholar, and think little more of it.

If, however, within a mile or two of this selfsame good-for-little school, there springs up, through the force of one good and sane man, who may still save a city from destruction, a high school, this common school, that seemed going into decay, will awaken into a new life, and scores of bright boys and girls instead of one will give birth to new hopes and new aspirations, and fill their minds with the riches of a higher education which will make rock and tree, and soil and leaf, and twig and bud and blossom, and earth and sky, and home and heaven, seem brighter, purer, sweeter, and give them the power and the purpose to go out into either a strenuous or a simple life, and not only reflect credit upon themselves and upon those who helped them in their dire need, but be a benediction and a blessing to the society in which they move.

Many years ago it was my fortune (whether good or ill I did not then know) to be invited to go out several miles from the city to present the claims of a township high school. The majority, or nearly so, of the people were tenants of a very wealthy landowner. I said to them: "You do not own the homes in which you live, nor the land on which you toil. You pay no taxes; but you have children, and those children ought, and have a right, to be educated. If you will but rise in your might and your right, and will appreciate the needs of your children, and go to the polls and vote for a high school, you can have free for them an education equal to that obtainable

in the great city." And the next day that great landowner came down to his vast estate and said: "What anarchist was he who came over here to stir up my tenants ['my serfs,' he might have said] to vote taxes on my property?" Those people bowed their vassal heads at his dictation and defeated the proposition. But there were a few who, like Garrison of old, were in earnest; they would not equivocate, they would not excuse, they would not retreat a single inch, and they would be heard; and after one or two more efforts the proposition was carried.

There not only exists today in that township one of the best high schools of the state, located on five acres of ground, which the landscape artist has made a garden of beauty, and near which a large athletic ground has been recently purchased for the sole use of the pupils, but the value of the land all over that township, because of the presence of that high school, has been incalculably increased.

Whether, acting in the rôle of an anarchist, as alleged, I hastened or delayed the establishment of that school I care little, since it soon came. Agitation always foreruns the success of every great cause. John the Baptists are essential to the birth of every great epoch. Nothing can withstand public opinion. Let this subject of high schools be discussed in the kitchen and the parlor, then in the corner grocery and the post-office, then in the public hall; and success is sure. Phillips says that there is nothing stronger than human prejudice. A crazy sentimentalism, like that of Peter the Hermit, hurled half of Europe upon Asia and changed the destinies of kingdoms. "We may be crazy," he said. Would to God we were all crazy enough to let these hearts of ours beat, beat, beat, under the promptings of a common humanity! With this faith, this purpose, we can not only keep Illinois first in corn, but make her first in schools.

Ours is a peculiar nation. England is for Englishmen, Germany for Germans, and France for Frenchmen; but America is for all races, all classes, all conditions, and all complexions of mankind. It is the complete agglutination of this conglomerate mass of all peoples that will make and keep us a puissant republic; and in no institution and under no conditions will this be so fully, so richly, and so safely brought about as in our secondary schools.

The social, intellectual, and moral life of our high schools, the deli-

cate and determining age at which pupils attend them, the most potent character-building period of all the years, the close relationship of teachers and pupils, the self-respect engendered, the friendships formed, the ambitions awakened, all tend to knit together into a common bond of aspiration these young people who are soon to become an important factor in our general community life.

Again, if the children of the great middle class of American citizens, who constitute the hope and the heart, the safety and the security of our republic, are to be educated, and thereby prevent an educational aristocracy of the rich alone, we must have free public high schools in every quarter and corner of the country, and make them tributary to the colleges and state universities. It took a decade of the fiercest fighting to make the colleges see that their work must commence where the high school leaves off; that there must be no unfordable moats, tangled meshes of barbed wire, nor manholes between the one and the other, and that the *acquirements* of the one must be the *requirements* of the other. This harmony now prevails; the union is complete. As the high schools lend an inspiration to the common schools, so the universities lend an inspiration to the high schools. The high schools, however, have something to learn that they have not yet learned. They are not colleges, and they should not ape colleges. To call these pupils freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, to encourage class yells and class colors, to espouse the brutality of football, or even to permit the existence of secret fraternities and sororities, are each and all detrimental to the better interests of the growing, adolescent child. These institutions in colleges are an inspiration; in high schools, a menace. In colleges they help to make men manly; in high schools they make boys mannish and girls silly. From the high schools they should be eradicated at all hazards. The high schools and common schools of a city, village, or township should all be under the same supervising board. The petty jealousies and unkind criticisms which now prevail between them are unworthy of anyone who would be called a teacher of youth. And when one board of education and one superintendent arranges and supervises the program of study, the methods of instruction, and the manner of promotions, these influences, which are now so harmful and so inexcusable, will be abandoned and forgotten.

In conclusion, then, let me say: In the name of the children of the farms, which so largely constitute the wealth of Illinois; in the name of the common schools, which need the inspiration of higher institutions to make them all they ought to be; in the name of the colleges, which should be fostered, not to educate the few of the rich, but rather the multitude of the middle class; in the name of the community, always willing to be taxed to make homes happier and lives more contented; in the names of all the youth who wish to be led into the ways where wisdom weaves her garlands, and who need, in these perilous years of that mysterious transition from childhood to maturity, the guardianship of the purest morals, and the guidance of the truest friends; and, lastly, in the name of the republic itself, whose perpetuity will depend on the sanity and intelligence of its citizens, I appeal to you, fellow-teachers, and through you to the homes of the state, to use every opportunity when afforded, and to make them when not afforded, to create a public opinion which shall crystallize into the establishment of free public high schools in sufficient number, and so conveniently located, as to give every child the advantages of this extended education.